

Government may spread the light

Preservation group may get local lighthouses

By Suzanne Colonna
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PLYMOUTH — A local group dedicated to preserving the Gurnet and Bug lights hopes to become the keeper of the two local lighthouses — for keeps.

The federal government may deem the two lighthouses surplus, opening them up to ownership by a nonprofit organization.

The National Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000 allows the government to dispose of historic lighthouses and stations it no longer needs.

The Coast Guard intends to declare about 300 lighthouses as "excess," with about 125 of them in the Northeast region, National Park Service architectural historian Alisa McCann said this week.

If the General Service Administration and the National Park Service approves the excess lighthouses as surplus, the government can deed them to nonprofit groups, federal, state or local governments in perpetuity.

The program gives nonprofit organizations an equal chance to acquire surplus historic lighthouses.

The law allows uses of the light stations for preservation, education, recreation, park, cultural or historical preservation purposes.

Project Gurnet and Bug Lights hopes to do just that.

Local residents founded the Project Bug Light organization in 1983 when the Coast Guard announced plans to demolish the 100-year-old Bug Light, also known as the Duxbury Pier Light. The organization has raised money for the restoration and maintenance of the light.

In 1999, members of the organization decided to include Plymouth Light, or the Gurnet Light in their preservation efforts.

Bug Light stands on a rock formation off the end of Plymouth Beach

just over the border with Duxbury. Gurnet Light stands on Gurnet Bluff at the opening of Plymouth Bay.

"We are very interested in getting ownership of them," Dolly Snow Bicknell, president of the organization said.

Bicknell said the group has anticipated the lighthouses becoming surplus for a while and expects the government will treat the two as unit.

"We've enjoyed having them," she said. "I think we've taken pretty good care of them for a while now."

Organizations interested in acquiring a surplus lighthouse must comply with the preservation restrictions set forth by the act, and have the ability to maintain the lighthouse in perpetuity.

The Coast Guard maintains the right to use the light as an active aid to navigation, if it chooses to do so.

If the General Service Administration determines no applicant meets its criteria, or no organizations apply, the government sells the property. The sale includes preservation covenants which provide for the maintenance of the historic structures.

Of surplus lighthouses which organizations have acquired so far, McCann said many groups set up tour programs. Others implement marine biological education programs, or convert the lighthouses to bed and breakfast inns.

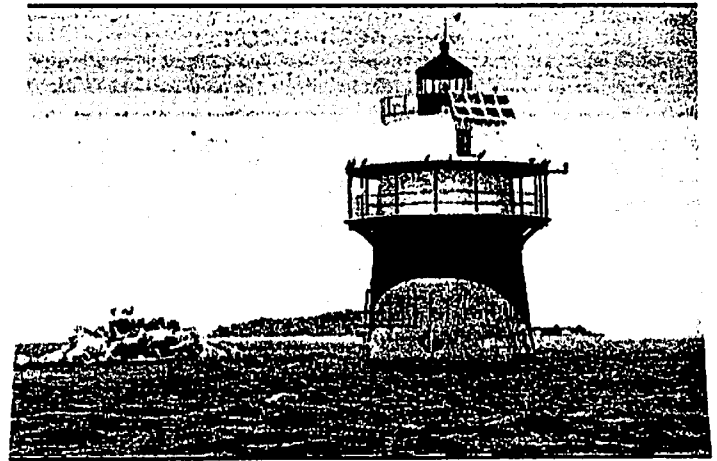
The lighthouses can help generate income for the organization which acquires it.

"They're expensive to maintain," McCann said. "Ask someone who has a house at the beach how often they have to repaint."

Bicknell said she did not know how long the process would take, but Project Gurnet and Bug Lights has already started the application process. She will attend a seminar at a Michigan lighthouse conference.

The group will hold an open house at the Gurnet May 29 in celebration of Duxbury's Opening of the Bay.

Contact Project Gurnet & Bug Lights Inc. at P.O. Box 2167, Duxbury, MA 02331.



Make it a Bug Light — Bug Light, at the crossroads

of channels from Plymouth and Duxbury, may be for sale.